



Steps to a Parent Council

Most schools now have a Parent Council however, there are some where the PC may have been disbanded due to lack of volunteers. Setting up a Parent Council may seem like a daunting task but we hope this leaflet will help answer some of the questions that may arise.

STEP 1

Set up a working group with responsibility for designing a draft constitution. Think about who you would like to include on this group: in a small school you may want to invite all the parents or in larger schools parents from each class/year group. Other people to think about may include the headteacher, other members of staff, the local minister, etc.

STEP 2

Once established, the working group should draw up the draft constitution which will then be presented to the Parent Forum for approval. (The Parent Forum consists of all the parents/carers with children at the school). Our leaflet "*A Model Constitution for Parent Councils*" will help you with this task but here are some useful pointers for now.

Name: Although you can call the Parent Council whatever you want (e.g. Friends of ...) it would be sensible to leave the name until the end of the process, until you have decided what you want the Parent Council to do and who should be on it.

Aims/purposes: A constitution is a description of the organisation that you want to have; it is not something fixed, so we would suggest that the working party begins by deciding what the Parent Council should do. A good starting point would be to list all the activities parents are currently or have been involved in at the school and think whether there is anything missing. Once you have a list of activities, match them to the *Aims – purposes of a Parent Council* suggested below:

- Supporting the school in its work with pupils (for example - fundraising, buying equipment, running clubs, running workshops for parents, etc)
- Representing the views of parents (for example - discussing school policies or lobbying the local authority)
- Promoting contact between the school, parents, pupils, providers of nursery education and the community (for example - social events, improving communications to make sure they are parent friendly)

- Reporting to the Parent Forum (for example - open meetings, newsletters, annual general meeting)

Membership and Selection: The next thing to consider is who should be on the Parent Council - how many parents and what selection process, if any, you should have. Remember, parents should always be in the majority and the committee should try to reflect the school community.

No-one really wants to turn parents away if they are keen to join so it is a good idea to mention a range of numbers – say from 5 to 20 – to allow the PC to continue whatever the level of parental enthusiasm. Even if you have a potentially large PC, not everyone will turn up every time, so meetings should usually be manageable.

The membership of a Parent Council is for each Parent Forum to decide itself, but there are a few requirements in legislation:

- Members will be drawn from parents with children currently at the school
- The headteacher (or his/her representative) has a right and duty to attend all Parent Council meetings
- In denominational schools, the local church can nominate a representative

If possible, it would be a good idea to draw parent members from each class/year group as this would be a great way of finding out the views and issues from across the school. Some parents may wish to be involved in the Parent Council but cannot attend meetings – think about *virtual* members who could be involved via email.

It is good practice for each new member of your Parent Council to be asked to read and agree to your child protection policy and a code of conduct. (*See our leaflet list on the back page*)

Other Members: Once the parent membership has been decided, then the working party has to consider whether anyone should be invited to be a co-opted member. Teachers, pupils, community representatives and others could either be invited to attend meetings as advisors on a “needs basis”.

Office Bearers: The only requirement in legislation is that the person who chairs Parent Council meetings must *always* be a parent with children at the school. The task of chairing can always be shared, as long as it is done by a parent.

The roles of office bearers can be treated as “posts”, with people actually appointed to be Chair, Secretary and Treasurer, or they can be seen as “jobs” which a number of people share. The legislation also suggests that a clerk could be appointed to undertake the roles of Secretary and Treasurer. If the clerk is a member of the Parent Council, the post will be unpaid, but if the appointee is not a PC member, he/she can be paid and the local authority will provide funding for this. The clerk may be a parent at the school or a member of the local community.

AGM: The legislation states that a Parent Council *must* report to the Parent Forum at least once a year and this is the AGM. The agenda should include reports on the activities of the group, on any money raised and how it has been spent. It is also the occasion when new Parent Council members are appointed. As part of the constitution, the working party needs to decide whether any office bearers are to be chosen at the AGM or at the first PC meeting after it; the latter system makes it easier if office bearers have to resign during the year. One important feature of all AGMs is that accounts have to be presented for approval. These accounts should have been checked preferably by someone with a financial background who is not a member of the Parent Council or a relative of one.

Other useful leaflets from Connect

- What is a Parent Council?
- Guidelines for a Parent Council Chair
- Guidelines for a Parent Council Secretary
- Guidelines for a Parent Council Treasurer
- Guidelines for Parent Council Committee Members
- Good Practice for Committee Meetings
- Constitutions Made Easy
- A Model Constitution for Parent Councils
- Good Practice for Annual General Meetings
- Template for a Code of Conduct

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- Access to online meetings and surgeries
- Our Backchat newsletter and eNewsletters
- Access to the members'-only section on the Connect website
- Annual Lecture
- Telephone and email helpline
- A wide variety of leaflets and other resources

You are welcome to use information from this leaflet however, if you do we ask that you acknowledge Connect.

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